

Ezra Chapter 10

Ezra 10:1 "Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore."

Ezra had confessed the sins of the people in prayer and supplication, with many tears.

"And casting himself down before the house of God":

In the outward court before the temple, his face turned towards it, where he lay prostrate.

"There assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women, and children":

It was quickly spread abroad, both in Jerusalem and places adjacent, that such a great man, a commissioner from the king of Persia, and a priest of the Jews, was in the utmost distress.

Rending his garments, and plucking off his hair, and was crying and praying in a vehement manner.

Which brought a great concourse of people, who concluded some great sins were committed, and sore judgments were coming upon them.

"For the people wept very sore":

Being affected with his confessions, cries, and tears, and fearing wrath would come upon them for their sins.

The people saw the grief of Ezra, and heard his prayer to God to forgive them.

Now many of the people had realized the seriousness of what they had done, and they too began to weep.

It seemed this was not just the men who were disturbed by this, but all of the people.

Ezra 10:2 "And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, [one] of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing."

This man seems to be one of those that now came with Ezra from Babylon (see Ezra 8:3).

"We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land":

Not that he had taken any himself, being but just come into the land.

Nor is his name in the list of those that had; but inasmuch as many of the nation, of which he was a part, and his own father, and several of his uncles had (Ezra 10:26), he expresses himself in this manner.

"Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing":

Of a reformation of this evil, and of pardon for it.

It appears that Shechaniah believed there was hope for the LORD to forgive them, because they had repentant hearts.

Ezra 10:3 "Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law."

Renew our covenant with him, and lay ourselves under fresh obligation by promise and oath, and unanimously agree;

"To put away all the wives, and such as are born of them":

He means all the strange wives, such marriages being unlawful.

And such wives might the more easily be put away, since bills of divorce were in frequent use with the Jews, and the children of such also being illegitimate.

And the rather they were to be put away, lest they should corrupt other children, or get into the affections of their fathers, which might lead one to receive their mothers again, and especially this was to be done as a punishment of their sin.

Though no doubt but a provision was to be made, and was made, for the maintenance both of wives and children.

"According to the counsel of my lord":

Either of Ezra, whom he honors with this title, being a ruler under the king of Persia; or of the LORD God, according to his will declared in his words, which is his counsel.

"And of those that tremble at the commandment of our God":

Feared to break it, and dreaded the effect of such a breach.

And who no doubt would follow the counsel of the LORD, and join in their advice to act according to the proposal made.

"And let it be done according to the law":

As that directs in such cases.

This would be a drastic move on their part, since some of these people had children by the heathen wives, or husbands they had.

They were willing to make a covenant with God that they would divorce the wives that were not Hebrews, and even give up their children that were born of them.

Ezra 10:4 "Arise; for [this] matter [belongeth] unto thee: we also [will be] with thee: be of good courage, and do [it]."

From the ground, where he lay prostrate.

"For this matter belongeth unto thee":

As a priest and scribe of the law, well versed in it, and therefore could direct what was to be done according to it.

And as a ruler under the king of Persia, and a commissioner of his, to inquire whether the law of God was observed by the Jews (Ezra 7:14), and so had authority to put the law in execution.

"We also will be with thee":

To help and assist in the reformation of this evil.

"Be of good courage, and do it":

Do not despair of going through it, though there may be some opposition to it.

Begin, and doubt not of succeeding.

Ezra had already said to let judgement come upon those who would not obey God's law.

This would be an effort to make things right.

Ezra believed this might be enough repentance of what they had done, to keep the LORD from killing them.

Ezra 10:5 "Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware."

From the ground where he lay.

"And made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word":

He took an oath of all that were present to do what was proposed, namely, to put away strange wives and their children.

"And they swore":

By means of which they were kept to their word of promise, an oath being a solemn, sacred thing.

The only way this would work, would be if everyone participated.

Everyone including the priests, Levites, and the people had to swear they would all do this, to get back in right standing with God.

Ezra 10:6 "Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and [when] he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away."

Departed from thence.

"And went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib":

Who was of the family of the high priest.

Eliashib was grandson of Joshua the high priest, and succeeded his father Joiakim as such.

But though Johanan was never high priest, being a younger son, however he was a person of note, and had a chamber in the temple, whither Ezra went.

Either to advise with the princes and elders in it (Ezra 10:8), or to refresh himself with food.

"And when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water":

Or rather "not yet had he eaten bread", as some render it.

That is, not till he came there, from the time he first heard of the evil the people had committed.

Which very probably was early in the morning, and it was now evening.

"For he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away":

Into captivity, but were now returned from it, and it grieved him the more, that, after such kindness shown them, they should be guilty of such an evil.

This fast was of a personal nature.

He was not eating, because he was still grieving.

Johanan was grandson of the high priest and would assign a chamber to Ezra.

This was a total fast.

Ezra 10:7 "And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem;"

By the voice of a herald.

"Throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity":

Who were returned from it.

"That they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem":

Within a time after mentioned.

The divorcement of the heathen wives, husbands, and children had to be done throughout the land, so proclamation was sent for the people to gather in Jerusalem.

Ezra 10:8 "And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away."

Or at the end of three days, as Jarchi, this was the space of time allowed, and which was decided upon for the quick dispatch of this affair, to prevent any schemes that might be formed to obstruct it.

And lest those who had agreed to it, and promised to assist in it, should repent and go from their word.

"According to the counsel of the princes and of the elders":

For though Ezra had a commission at large from the king of Persia, to inquire into and reform all abuses, he chose not to act of himself, but to have the opinion and consent of the senate of the nation.

This he prudently did to avoid their envy, and that he might have less opposition, and better success.

"All his substance should be forfeited":

Or "devoted" to sacred uses, to be put into the treasury of the temple, and used in the service of it, and therefore never to be returned.

"And himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away":

Into captivity, but now returned from it.

That is, should be excommunicated from them as a church, and be no more reckoned of the body politic, or a freeman of Israel, and so deprived of all privileges both in church and state.

This left them no choice but to come.

The furthest settlements from Jerusalem were no more than 40 miles, so it would be fairly easy for them to come within the three days allowed.

The consequences were so great if they did not come, that all came.

Ezra 10:9 "Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It [was] the ninth month, on the twentieth [day] of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of [this] matter, and for the great rain."

And such of the ten tribes that returned and dwelt among them.

"Gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days":

The time fixed: which they were the more careful to observe, since it was enjoined by the authority of princes and elders, and the punishment in case of disobedience very severe.

"It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month":

The month Chisleu, which answers to part of November and part of December, so that the twentieth day must be in the beginning of December.

This was almost five months after Ezra came to Jerusalem.

"And all the people sat in the street of the house of God":

The street which led to the temple, the east street (2 Chron. 29:4), though some think this was the court of the people, called a street, because it lay open, not yet walled in.

And, according to Josephus, it was in an upper room of the temple in which Ezra was, perhaps the same with the chamber of Johanan (Ezra 10:6).

"Trembling because of this matter":

They were worried; some that were guilty, not knowing what punishment would be inflicted on them, and others that were not.

Yet dreaded the wrath of God, lest that should break out upon the whole congregation for it.

"And for the great rain":

Which now fell, and which they interpreted as a token of the divine displeasure.

For though it was in winter time, yet not with them a time of rain, for the former rain had fallen a month before.

So that this being unusual and unexpected, they understood it as betokening evil to them.

This would have been about December the 12th on our calendar.

The month would have been Chisleu on their calendar.

This is the rainy season in Judah.

Perhaps, that is what is meant by the great rain.

Ezra 10:10 "And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel."

In the midst of the assembly to make his speech, acquainting them with the reason of their meeting together.

"And said unto them, Ye have transgressed":

The law of God in the following instance.

"And have taken strange wives":

Of the people of the land and others, idolatrous persons.

"To increase the trespass of Israel":

To add to former iniquities, which had been the cause of the captivity.

Ezra had been put in a place of great authority by the Persian king.

He now used that authority to speak to the people about what they must do.

He was speaking to them as a spiritual leader, when he informed them of their transgressions.

Ezra 10:11 "Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives."

Of their sin, and express their detestation of it, and repentance for it.

"And do his pleasure":

Obeys his will, and particularly in this case.

"And separate yourselves from the people of the land":

The Canaanites, etc.

Have no fellowship with them, make no covenants, contracts, and alliances with them for the future.

"And from the strange wives":

They had taken; put them away.

It would be of no use to rid themselves of their heathen wives if they did not realize in their hearts that they must do this, because they had sinned.

The first step to being forgiven is to confess the sin.

Ezra 10:12 "Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do."

That they might be heard, and to show that they were willing and ready to comply with what was proposed.

"As thou hast said, so must we do":

Being convinced of their sin, they saw it was a duty incumbent on them to put away their strange wives, and that there was a necessity of it, to avert the wrath of God from them.

Once they were made aware of their sins, they agreed to make it right.

They would be divorced from the heathen.

Ezra 10:13 "But the people [are] many, and [it is] a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither [is this] a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing."

Who have been guilty of this evil.

"And it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without":

In the street, because of the rain.

"Neither is this a work of one day or two":

To inquire into this affair, who they are that have taken strange wives, and to persuade or oblige them to put them away.

"For we are many that have transgressed in this thing":

In marrying strange wives.

It appears that a large percentage of the population had committed this sin.

It was the rainy season, and hard to move this many people.

They were explaining it would take some time to implement this.

Ezra 10:14 "Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us."

Let the great Sanhedrin, or court of judicature at Jerusalem, be fixed and continued, and others.

"And let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times":

To the court at Jerusalem, at certain and fixed known times of their sittings there for this purpose.

"And with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof":

The principal magistrates of it, who were to testify that upon search and inquiry those were the men and all the men in their city, that had taken strange wives, and that they had put them away according to the order of the princes and elders.

And this they proposed to be done in every city, and the account to be brought to the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, who were to sit at certain times till this affair was finished.

"Until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us":

Which it seems had broken out in some instances, and they feared would do yet more, unless this step was taken, whereby they hoped it would be averted.

It appears, there was some sort of ceremony that took place to release the people from this marriage.

It was a reverse wedding, I suppose.

Ezra 10:15 "Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah were employed about this [matter]: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them."

To see that this affair was conducted in the manner proposed.

That the magistrates of every city brought the persons that had been delinquents, in their turns, of which they gave them notice, and took the account of them as they came.

"And Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them":

Assisted them in this work.

The other two perhaps were priests, and both these Levites.

And these four were the only persons appointed over this matter, as the phrase in the preceding clause may signify.

The dissolving of the marriages was handled by Jonathan and Jahaziah.

Meshullam and Shabbethai were their helpers.

This could mean they issued them bills of divorcements.

Ezra 10:16 "And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, [with] certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by [their] names, were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter."

Put away their strange wives.

"And Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names, were separated":

From all their other business, and gave themselves up to attend to this matter entirely.

"And sat down in the first day of the tenth month":

The month Tebeth, which answers to part of December and January.

This was ten days after the assembly of all the people met and broke up.

These took their places in the great court, and there they sat.

"To examine the matter":

The accounts brought in from the several cities by the magistrates thereof, and recorded them.

This took until January on our calendar, there were so many of them.

On the twelfth of January, Ezra and the chiefs of the fathers checked to make sure they had completed the work.

Ezra 10:17 "And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month."

Finished their inquiry and examination of them.

"By the first day of the first month":

The month Nisan, answering to part of March and April; so that they were three months about this work.

We see that it was not until April 1st on our calendar, that they finally had finished issuing the divorces.

Ezra 10:18 "And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives: [namely], of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren; Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah."

So that it need not be wondered at that this evil should spread among the people, when those who understood the law, and should have instructed the people in it, set such an example: namely;

"Of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak":

Who was the high priest; and perhaps for this fault of his, in not restraining his sons from such unlawful marriages, is he represented in filthy garments (Zech. 3:3).

"And his brethren, Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah":

These were the brethren of Jeshua.

Ezra 10:19 "And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and [being] guilty, [they offered] a ram of the flock for their trespass."

They proposed to do it, and actually did it.

"And being guilty":

Of which they were fully convinced.

"They offered a ram of the flock for their trespass":

To make atonement for it, and thereby set an example to others to do the like.

Aben Ezra observes, that we do not find that the trespass offering was a fine to such who married strange wives, and conjectures, that it was the advice of the chief men to do it.

From hence, to the end of (Ezra 10:43), is a list of the men that had married strange wives, and put them away.

Those in (Ezra 10:20), were priests.

In (Ezra 10:23), Levites, and those of them who were singers or porters, the rest were Israelites.

And it is a very common distinction, in rabbinical writers, to distinguish the Jews into priests, Levites, and Israelites.

Of these we know no more than their names; some of the heads of the families may be observed in (Ezra 2:1).

It appears, that 4 of the high priest's sons had taken these heathen wives.

The "giving of their hands" meant they made solemn pledges accompanied by handshakes.

This meant they agreed they would do this, and gave their word on it.

The sacrifices were for them, and for others who had committed this same sin.

Ezra 10:20-22

"And of the sons of Immer; Hanani, and Zebadiah."

"And of the sons of Harim; Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uziah."

"And of the sons of Pashur; Eliezer, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethaneel, Jozabad, and Eliah."

The above names are lists of the families of the priests who took the strange women to wife.

Ezra 10:23 "Also of the Levites; Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah, (the same [is] Kelita,) Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer."

These are Levites, who were not priests.

Ezra 10:24 "Of the singers also; Eliashib: and of the porters; Shallum, and Telem, and Uri."

These were also in the service of the LORD in the temple, but were singers and porters.

They were Levites with specified service.

We continue the list began in (Ezra 10:20).

Ezra 10:25-43

"Moreover of Israel: of the sons of Parosh; Ramiah, and Jeziah, and Malchiah, and Miamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah."

"And of the sons of Elam; Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Eliah."

"And of the sons of Zattu; Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza."

"Of the sons also of Bebai; Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, [and] Athlai."

"And of the sons of Bani; Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, and Ramoth."

"And of the sons of Pahath-moab; Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezaleel, and Binnui, and Manasseh."

"And [of] the sons of Harim; Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchiah, Shemaiah, Shimeon," "Benjamin, Malluch, [and] Shemariah."

"Of the sons of Hashum; Mattenai, Mattathah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, [and] Shimei."

"Of the sons of Bani; Maadai, Amram, and Uel,"

"Benaiah, Bedeiah, Chelluh,"

"Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,"

"Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasau, "And Bani, and Binnui, Shimei,"

" And Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah,"

"Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai,"

"Azareel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah,"

"Shallum, Amariah, [and] Joseph."

"Of the sons of Nebo; Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, and Joel, Benaiah."

This concludes the list began at (Ezra 10:20).

This was a very long list of just ordinary people, who had taken heathen wives.

We can see the widespread sin that was in the land.

Ezra 10:44 "All these had taken strange wives: and [some] of them had wives by whom they had children."

In all about one hundred and thirteen.

"And some of them had wives by whom they had children":

And yet they put them away, which made it the more difficult for them to do.

And those that had none, it is thought to be a mark of God's displeasure at such marriages.

No mention being made of the children being put away, as Shechaniah proposed (Ezra 10:3).

It may be concluded they were not, but were taken care of, to be educated in the true religion, and entered proselytes at a proper time.

And the rather, as Ezra gave no orders about their putting away (Ezra 10:11).

This would make the divorces more difficult, when there were children born to them, by their heathen wives.

Ezra Chapter 10 Questions

1. What had Ezra done to show his shame for their sins?
2. Who joined him in the grief?
3. Who is the father of Shechaniah?
4. What hope did he express?
5. What did he suggest that they do?
6. What was the covenant they would make with God?
7. What would they do with their children by their heathen wives?
8. How did Ezra feel about this suggestion?
9. Who did Ezra make swear to the covenant agreement?

10. How was the only way this could work?
11. Who did Ezra go to see at the temple?
12. What did Ezra do at the temple?
13. Was this just a problem in Jerusalem?
14. How did they get word to those in Judah?
15. How long did they have to comply?
16. What time of year did this notice go out?
17. This was the _____ season.
18. Who had given Ezra great authority?
19. What must they do, besides get rid of their heathen wives?
20. Why would it take some time to implement this?
21. Who was issuing the divorces?
22. Who examined to see, if they were carrying this out?
23. When were all of the divorces finished?
24. What were some of the classes of people, who had committed this sin
25. What made the divorces more difficult?